



TAMMY CALLENS (b. 1962)  
**TEMPTRESS**  
 2009, OIL ON LINEN PANEL, 30 x 30 IN.  
 SAGE CREEK GALLERY, SANTA FE  
 PHOTO: W. GARTH DOWLING

women posed in darkened conditions indoors. (The vaguely symbolist *femme fatale* illustrated here is a fine, and very recent, example.)

Callens is represented by Foxhall Gallery (Washington, DC), Mountain Trails Gallery (Jackson Hole), Panache Gallery (Mendocino, CA), and Sage Creek Gallery (Santa Fe).

**ALEXEY STEELE** (b. 1967) is truly a citizen of the world. Born in Kiev, he trained from an early age with his father, the renowned Russian painter Leonid Steele (b. 1921). After studying at Moscow's prestigious Surikov Art Institute, Steele moved to Los Angeles with his family, realizing that the Soviet art world they knew so well — flawed as it was — would soon vanish.

Steele has gone on to make a big impression with his "Russian maximalism," which blends the draftsmanship, ambitious compositions, and symbols of the classical tradition with a cool palette and palpable naturalism derived from the Moscow school. (For the latter, see the February 2009 issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*.) You will always find a dozen works under way in Steele's studio: perhaps a large drawing for one of his life-size, multi-figure murals (endowed with recognizably modern physiques and an almost baroque dynamism); or perhaps a commissioned portrait; or a *plein air* Californian landscape (with or without figures).

Steele says that, for Russians, art is not a luxury, but a basic need like shelter. Just as his father rattled the Soviet authorities with his art, so Steele — whom the *Los Angeles Times* has described as "intense" — believes that, "in this commercial world of ours, art is the ultimate act of defiance." His desire to see art displace greed and conspicuous consumption, and to reclaim its rightful place speaking truth to power, is explored on his unique website ([highartforever.com](http://highartforever.com)), and also through his artworks.

For example, a large drawing in conté crayon now in the Carnegie Art Museum in Oxnard — *The Quiet Steps of Approaching Thunder* — connects our environmental crisis to man's ignoring that what hurts nature hurts him: Here thunder rolls across the ocean in the form of herald angels toward a littered beach. This November, an ongoing

mural project helped Steele win the Philippines' Gusi Peace Prize for using "art as a tool of international conflict resolution"; his sensitivity to others (both their appearances and inner lives) also comes across in the *My Neighbor* portraits series, for which the interfaith leader Imam Ashraf Carrim sat.

Steele's boundary-crossing is most visible through *Classical Underground*, the monthly series of informal events he has hosted since 2007. These combine chamber recitals with displays of contemporary representational art made by such colleagues as Dan Pinkham, Christopher Pugliese, Jeremy Lipking, Ignat Ignatov, and his father Leonid Steele. The huge success of this initiative, which draws several hundred listeners per event (with hundreds more unable to secure a reservation), has only reinforced Steele's belief that classical art and music still matter to modern audiences. Watch this space to see where this enlightened view takes him next.

Steele is represented by American Legacy Fine Arts (Pasadena, CA).

ALEXEY STEELE (b. 1967)  
**LAST MAN STANDING**  
 2006, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 x 30 IN.  
 AMERICAN LEGACY FINE ARTS, PASADENA

